

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 3299

JOINT STATE/DEFENSE MESSAGE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, MOPS, LE, SY, IS, PLO
SUBJECT: SAIQA-SOUTH LEBANON

REF: BEIRUT 1220

1. THE SAIQA DEPLOYMENT TO SOUTH LEBANON AND THE REACTION TO IT OFFERS A GOOD ILLUSTRATION OF THE DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS BETWEEN ISRAELIS AND THEIR NEIGHBORS REGARDING THE PROBLEMS OF SOUTH LEBANON. WE WISH TO TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT ON REFTEL TO POINT OUT THOSE DIFFERENCES.

2. FIRST, THE ISRAELIS START FROM A DIFFERENT BASE. OUR SOURCES HAD NOT INDICATED ANY CONCERN OVER SAIQA FORCES SOUTH OF THE LITANI UNTIL LATE FEBRUARY, ALTHOUGH THEY HAD REPORTED SAIQA PRESENCE IN NABATIYAH (NORTH OF THE RIVER) SINCE JANUARY 1977. IN OTHERWORDS, THE ISRAELIS HAD NOT ACCEPTED AS HARD FACT THE PRESENCE OF 1500-2000 SAIQA TROOPS SOUTH OF THE LITANI SINCE LAST CONFIDENTIAL

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SPRING (AS REPORTED IN PARA TWO REFTEL).

3. SECOND, THE PROXIMITY OF THE POINTS WHERE SAIQA UNITS ARE NOW REPORTED CLOSE TO THE ISRAELI BORDER GIVES GENUINE CAUSE FOR CONCERN HERE. THE PAST INSISTENCE ON THE "RED LINE" DEMONSTRATED ISRAELI SENSITIVITY TO SYRIAN PRESENCE IN THE AREA AND, AS PARA FIVE REFTEL POINTS

OUT, THE ISRAELIS SEE SAIQA AS AN ARM OF THE SYRIAN MILITARY. REFTEL IS CORRECT THAT THESE RECENT DEPLOYMENTS DO NOT CONSTITUTE A STRATEGIC THREAT TO ISRAEL. BUT THAT IS NOT THE ISSUE. BECAUSE THOSE UNITS ARE CLOSE TO ISRAEL'S BORDER--AND THEY ARE THERE NOT AS "SCATTERED ELEMENTS" BUT AS COMPANIES-- THE ISRAELI PERCEPTION OF THE THREAT HAS BEEN GIVEN ANOTHER DIMENSION. (INCIDENTALLY OUR SOURCES BELIEVE A COUNTER ATTACK AGAINST MARUN EL RAS WAS A COMBINED -- SAIQA, FATAH AND REJECTIONIST -- ATTACK.)

4. FINALLY, WITH REFERENCE TO THE STATEMENT IN REFTEL THAT THE SYRIANS DID NOT INTEND BY THIS DEPLOYMENT TO PROVOKE ISRAEL, WE WOULD SAY THAT WHATEVER THE INTENDED MOTIVE, THE RESULT MAY BE QUITE DIFFERENT. WHETHER PROVOCATION WAS INTENDED OR NOT, THE DEPLOYMENT DEFINITELY HEIGHTENS ISRAEL'S ANXIETY AND THE POTENTIAL FOR ARMED INTERVENTION HAS RISEN ACCORDINGLY. THIS IS PARTICULARLY SO BECAUSE FURTHER DETERIORATION OF THE CHRISTIAN POSITION WILL NOW BE BLAMED ON SAIQA, I.E. SYRIA.

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